
Solving Relationship Problems

There is one mode of therapy that emphasizes whatever is working you do more of it. That is good practice for all of us as husbands, wives and parents. If my wife gives me a neck rub, and I never thank her for it or tell her I enjoy that, then she may not do it anymore. However, if I let her know I notice that, and thank her for it, then I probably will be getting more of them. The same is true in all areas of our family. When my children bring home good grades from school, we reward them and praise them. Let me tell you, praise, pats on the back and a little reward for something good goes a long way with children and it reinforces good behavior. Below, I summarize several important thoughts about how to solve relationship problems. These are just a few thoughts, but will probably hit you where your relationship rubs.

If It Ain't Broke ._._.

If things are going well in some area, you don't have to change that area or doubt yourself or the relationship. Determine what is working and do more of that. As I said above, notice the positive and do not concentrate on the negative.

Stop Listening to Experts

These days, you can find yourself doing something kind or compassionate for your partner and wonder if you are really being "co-dependent." Or reading a magazine article and suddenly deciding that your relationship doesn't really make it according to the guidelines you are reading. You are your own relationship expert. Trust your intuition and your common sense. Don't let outside experts (not just the ones in magazines or on television talk shows, also your well-intentioned friends, coworkers, or relatives) talk you out of something you like or into something that you know isn't right for you. The person you should be talking to is your partner.

Do Something Different

They say that the only difference between a rut and a grave is the dimensions, and some couples have gotten into pretty deep ruts. Try changing anything you do in the relationship when you have problems (keep it ethical and safe, of course). If you usually argue in the bedroom, go into the kitchen and have the same discussion by writing it out on paper to one another and passing notes. If you usually fall asleep to the evening news, go bowling one night. Break out of your usual ruts by doing something completely out of character for you. If you continue to do what you usually do, you'll probably continue to get the usual responses and results. Maybe instead of going out to a movie on Friday night (not many to choose from on SHAPE), you take your wife out for a romantic meal. Instead of asking your husband to go to a mall where he will probably get bored again, you ask him out for a walk or go shoot some hoops with him. It is up to you to come up with the idea.

Find a Different Way to Look at Things

There's an old saying: Nothing is as dangerous as an idea when it is the only one you have. We are all prisoners of our limited points of view and we have a tendency to think our point of view is the only correct way of seeing things, especially when we are upset. So, when you are stuck or unhappy, find another way of looking at it. Think of the situation from another angle. For example, how would you be thinking of this situation if it was your child or your best friend instead of your spouse or partner? Maybe, try looking at the problem from your partner's point of view. In counseling, we call the internalized other. That is where I get one spouse to answer my questions from the other spouse's view. It's amazing how it works and how well it works. I will tell John, "Ok, John, you will be Jane for the next 5-10 minutes. When I address you, I will be calling you Jane and expect you to answer how you think she will answer." So, I may ask, "what is it about this issue that makes you so angry?" John will answer as Jane and will say something like, "Well, I feel so hurt when John goes off with his friends and leaves me alone on a Friday night." I think you get the picture. If we can see the problem from another angle, then the solution may come much easier.

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